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ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with the relationship between career orientation, choice of a predominantly masculine or feminine field, and feminine self-concept. It was predicted that career oriented women would see themselves as less feminine than noncareer oriented women and that women aspiring to predominantly male fields would see themselves as less feminine than women aspiring to predominantly female fields. A sample of 300 women completed and returned a questionnaire. The most striking finding was that women who aspire to male-dominated fields see themselves as less feminine than the traditionalists and also want to be less feminine than women oriented toward the more traditionally female fields. There were some trends in the data to indicate that women who are not career oriented show more discrepancy between the real and ideal feminine self concept. In general, on the female valued items, women would like to be more feminine than they believe themselves to be and on the male valued items, they would like to be more masculine than they believe themselves to be. (RK)

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FEMALE IDENTITY AND OCCUPATIONAL COMMITMENT

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Today, one-third of the nation's labor force are women. Over the last half century, women have played an ever-increasing role in the labor force due to such factors as increased labor saving devices, greater longevity, and smaller families. And there is reason to believe that women will play an even greater role in the work force of the future.

These women are employed in jobs which are lower-skilled, lower-paying, and lower-status positions relative to positions predominantly held by men, and the skill, pay, and status gap is widening. Further, the major source of employment for college women--teaching--is an area in which the number of positions available to women is declining partly as a result of a lower birth rate which is reducing the number of children entering school at the lower grades, and partly because men are filling the teaching positions in the higher grades. Yet it is predicted that other feminine sex-typed positions cannot absorb the overflow. Meantime, there are certain male sex-typed professions such as medicine and dentistry, in which serious deficiencies presently occur and more serious deficiencies are projected for the future. Hedges (1970) has predicted that unless the career patterns of the college woman are changed, greater unemployment among college women will ensure.

Yet such considerations pose serious problems. Little is known of the career aspirations of the college woman. Research is needed to understand factors which influence the career choices of women. Research is needed to investigate the very complex and pervasive socialization processes within our culture which predispose the college woman to restrict her career aspirations. More research is needed to understand the experiences which women face after they have chosen and trained for a position which is traditionally held by men.

CG 006 713

It is hypothesized here that a basic conflict exists between the behavior which others expect of a woman, and behaviors which are necessary for success in traditionally male positions. That is, a basic conflict exists between socially desirable feminine behavior and behavior of persons who hold leadership decision-making positions.

Broverman et. al (1970) found that traits which are socially desirable for females are that she be very tactful, gentle, aware of feelings of others, very religious, interested in her own appearance, neat in habits, quiet, have a very strong need for security, etc. In contrast, socially acceptable behavior for men are that they are to be independent, dominant, active, logical, adventurous, not emotional, make decisions easily, self confident, ambitious, competitive, to almost always always act as a leader, etc.

Reviews of the literature on leadership traits by Gibb (1954), Stodgill (1948), and others, report persistent trends as to what constitutes a successful leader. Very generally, successful leaders are more independent, autonomous, self-confident, achieving, active, and decisive--characteristics which are found to be socially acceptable behaviors for men but which are not socially acceptable behaviors for women.

Hence, a basic conflict occurs between behaviors that are expected of a woman, and behaviors that are expected of a person in a leadership decision-making position. That is, how can a woman be quiet, tactful, gentle, and have a strong need for security, and at the same time be independent, autonomous, self-confident, achieving, active, and decisive? Women who hold such leadership positions often speak of the "tight rope walking" they must do in order to succeed on the job while at the same time not deviating too markedly from behaviors which others expect from her as a woman.

Since leadership behavior is expected of men, it is no surprise that most leadership, decision-making positions are held by men. We refer here to such professions as scientists, professors, political leaders, doctors, lawyers, and business executives. In contrast, positions predominantly held by women, which we refer to as female sex-typed positions, include nursing, secretarial work, elementary school teaching, dietetics, librarian work--generally help-mate or supportive positions.

Given that male characteristics are more consistent with those behaviors expected of individuals holding male sex-typed positions--behaviors which are incompatible with that which is expected of the female--one might hypothesize that women who choose male sex-typed professions such as medicine, law, science, etc., or the "pioneers" as Rossi (1965) would call them, see themselves as less feminine--as defined by the feminine stereotype--and more masculine--as defined by the male stereotype. Further, women who choose the feminine sex-typed positions, that is, nursing, elementary school teaching, dietetics, etc., or the "traditionals" as Rossi would call them, and the noncareer oriented or the "homemakers" as per Rossi, will see themselves as more feminine and less masculine as defined by the sex-role stereotypes.

That is, women who choose predominantly male professions see themselves as more independent, autonomous, self-confident, and achieving, and less passive and dependent than are women who choose the more traditional feminine careers.

This is the issue to which Dr. Cowan is addressing, in her investigation of the self-concept and career choice of college women.

The study at Wayne State University takes as its point of departure Almquist's and Angrist's (1970) work on occupation choice among college women in looking at both traditionality of career choice and career orientation. Almquist and Angrist found that women aspiring to male-dominated fields, or pioneers as Rossi calls them had experienced broadening or enriching events rather than deviant experiences. The specific area of interest in this study was the relationship between career orientation, choice of a predominantly masculine or feminine field, and feminine self-concept.

It was predicted that career-oriented college woman would see themselves as less feminine that noncareer oriented woman and that women aspiring to predominantly male fields, or pioneers, would see themselves as less feminine, than traditionals, or women aspiring to predominantly female fields. It was also predicted that the ideal selves would be less feminine for career oriented and for pioneer women.

A sample of 300 college women was obtained through classroom instructors at Wayne State University, a large urban university in the center of Detroit. Instructors were asked to participate on the basis of two criteria: they were teaching fairly large classes and the instructors chosen would provide a comparison of liberal arts, education, and nursing students.

Of 500 questionnaires delivered to instructors, 300 were completed and returned. The determination of pioneer vs. traditional career-orientation was made through the use of the 1960 census data with the criterion of a pioneer being a college female who aspired to a field in which there were less than one-third women currently working. Some ambiguity exists in the determination of sex-typing of the field because the census data does not give sex breakdowns for many fields. For example, the breakdown of female psychologist for subareas in psychology is not available. Also, it was noted that women who aspired to a male dominated field often do so in terms of typically female interest in children; e.g. juvenile law or child clinical psychologist.

Using Angrist's criteria for career orientation, a subject was considered career oriented if she planned to enter the labor force as indicated on two of three questions asked. First, if she would probably want to work or definitely want to work if she had one or more children of school age and her husband's salary was adequate. Second, if fifteen years from now she would like to be a career woman; and thirdly, if her preferred adult role alternatives were full or part-time work vs. participating in clubs, volunteer work, hobbies, sports, concentrating on home and family.

There was no relationship between career orientation and sex of field in the sample. 84.4% aspired to predominantly female fields or were traditionals vs. 16.6% who were pioneers. 69.9% were career-oriented and 39.1% were non career-oriented. 49.5% of the sample were career-oriented toward predominantly female fields. A larger percent of women aspiring to male-dominated fields anticipated working full time. 24% of the liberal arts students aspired to male-dominated fields. It is interesting to note that many women are career-oriented but that if they are career-oriented toward traditional fields, a good proportion of them see themselves as working only part time. This part-time orientation, we feel, is part of the unrealism of career planning in women.

The scale used to measure feminine self-concept was that used by Broverman et. al., in several studies. The first page on the handout gives the 37 sex stereotypes used. The scale consists of 37 sex stereotypic terms on a seven-point bipolar scale. An independent assessment had shown that 26 of these terms were male valued; that is, the male pole is considered more generally socially desirable for men; while 11 items are female valued or considered socially desirable for women. The feminine self-concept scale was analyzed in several ways. First, an overall real and ideal feminine self-concept was obtained using all 37 items scored in the masculine direction. A further breakdown consisted of looking at the male and female-valued items spearately. Finally, the scale was scored on the basis of

the socially desirable direction of the items, regardless of the sexual pole. Thus, the scales "easily expresses tender feelings" and "ambitious" would be scored in opposite directions for the feminine self-concept scale but in the same direction for the social desirability scoring, since both scales are socially desirable, although one is socially desirable for men and the other is socially desirable for women. Discrepancies for real and ideal self-concepts were obtained for each analysis although no predictions were made.

The second page of the handout shows the effects of the sex of field; that is, traditional or pioneer and career orientation. A multivariate analysis-of-variance for unequal n's was used with two factors (sex of field and career orientation) at two levels each.

The most striking finding was that women who aspire to male-dominated fields or the pioneers, see themselves as less feminine than the traditionals and also want to be less feminine than women oriented toward the more traditionally female fields. There were some trends in the data to indicate that women who are not career oriented show more discrepancy between the real and ideal feminine self-concept. In general, on the female valued items, women would like to be more feminine than they believe themselves to be and on the male valued items, they would like to be more masculine than they believe themselves to be.[1]

On the overall sex stereotype scale, both the real and the ideal selves of women aspiring to male-dominated fields were significantly less feminine than for more traditionally oriented women. Neither sex of field nor career orientation were related to the discrepancy between the real and ideal feminine self-concept.

On both the female valued and male valued items considered separately, the real self concept was less feminine for women aspiring to male-dominated fields.

[1]Perhaps this indicates that college women would desire the best of both male and female cultural stereotypes.

For the ideal self concept, the pioneers were less feminine on the female valued items and showed the same trend on the male valued items. On the ideal self measure for the female valued items, an interaction between sex of field and career orientation was found with career oriented females aspiring to male dominated fields desiring to be less feminine,[2]

On the discrepancy between real and ideal self for both the female valued and male valued items considered separately, there was a provocative trend for non-career oriented women to show more discrepancy than career oriented women. If discrepancy between real and ideal self is an indication of adjustment as Rogers suggests, this finding might imply that career oriented women are more adjusted than college women who do not see themselves in career terms. In a changing society where college women may begin to think that career aspirations are not only possible but also desirable, the healthy college female is both more accepting of her image of herself on sex-typed characteristics and also has a broadened image of herself which includes occupational identity.

Although it is apparent that career orientation is not related to feminine self concept, either ideal or real, the choice of predominantly female or traditional field, as opposed to a predominantly male field clearly is related to feminine self concept. The data does not warrant the conclusion that socialization into femaleness PRECLUDES occupational choice into male dominated fields; however, the findings are not inconsistent with that hypothesis. Further analysis of the data should clarify the variable related to atypicality of chosen field and extent of career orientation in college women. Although Almquist and Angrist's data show that women who aspire to male-dominated fields have had broadening rather than deviant experiences, the Wayne State University sample will test this notion further since Wayne has a broader range of females in terms of such variables as sex, race, and aptitude. Angrist's finding that women whose mothers work are more

[2]The scoring of items in purely social desirability direction shows no significant effects. The effects are washed out by combining both male and female valued items.

career oriented may possibly be true only for middle class females. For less advantaged women, a working mother may be unrelated to career orientation.

Two points have been suggested here:

1. First, women who fit the cultural stereotype of feminity may find themselves incapacited or at least less adaptive in the kinds of occupational positions which this culture values.

2. Secondly, women who fit the cultural stereotype of feminity may not even find themselves in such a position because the data on college women shows that the women who see themselves as more feminine are less likely to aspire to traditionally-male fields. Thus the occupational development of women is truncated perhaps by her views about herself. We need to learn more about the opening of options of women both environmentally and psychologically so that the choices of what work women will do are made in a more open and broader context.

FOOTNOTE:

A final point of clarification should be made. We do not intend to imply that we are endorsing the view that women need only adopt the masculine sex-role stereotype as a resolution to the basic conflict noted here.

Both the feminine and masculine sex-role stereotypes contain both positive and negative aspects from the view-point of socially responsible behavior. What is needed is an amalgamation of the two roles in the development of a new adult image--one which captures the positive aspects of both roles and one which allows greater individual freedom for all members within our society to actualize their potential.

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TOTAL SCORE MEANS (37 items)

	Real Self	Ideal Self	Discrepancy
traditional-career	139.12	163.43	23.03
traditional-noncareer	140.17	164.06	25.14
pioneer-career	153.30	173.82	20.88
pioneer-noncareer	147.47	168.80	21.47
Significance Level			
trad,-pioneer	.002	.05	n.s.
career-noncareer	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
interaction	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

FEMALE VALUED ITEMS MEANS (11 items)

	Real Self	Ideal Self	Discrepancy
traditional-career	30.56	27.42	2.89
traditional-noncareer	30.70	26.78	4.66
pioneer-career	34.97	31.61	3.36
pioneer-noncareer	31.20	26.13	5.07
Significance Level			
trad.-pioneer	.009	.01	n.s.
career-noncareer	n.s.	.11	.06
interaction	.13	.04	n.s.

MALE VALUED ITEMS MEANS (26 items)

	Real Self	Ideal Self	Discrepancy
traditional-career	109.47	134.72	25.57
traditional-noncareer	108.53	137.58	29.47
pioneer-career	118.00	142.27	24.33
pioneer-noncareer	116.27	142.67	26.40
Significance Level			
trad.-pioneer	.02	.10	n.s.
career-noncareer	n.s.	n.s.	.10
interaction	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

G.C. Cowan and L. Moore
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Male-Valued and Female-Valued Stereotypic Items

Feminine Pole	Masculine Pole
Male-Valued Items	
	Socially Desirable
Not at all aggressive	Very aggressive
Not at all independent	Very independent
Very emotional	Not at all emotional
Does not hide emotions at all	Almost always hides emotions
Very subjective	Very objective
Very easily influenced	Not at all easily influenced
Very submissive	Very dominant
Very excitable in a minor crisis	Not at all excitable in a minor crisis
Very passive	Very active
Not at all competitive	Very competitive
Very illogical	Very logical
Very home centered	Very worldly
Not at all skilled in business	Very skilled in business
Very sneaky	Very direct
Does not know the ways of the world	Knows the ways of the world
Feelings easily hurt	Feelings not easily hurt
Not at all adventurous	Very adventurous
Has difficulty making decisions	Can make decisions easily
Cries very easily	Never cries
Almost never acts as a leader	Almost always acts as a leader
Not at all self-confident	Very self-confident
Very uncomfortable about being aggressive	Not at all uncomfortable about being aggressive
Not at all ambitious	Very ambitious
Unable to separate feelings from ideas	Easily able to separate feelings from ideas
Very dependent	Not at all dependent
Very conceited about appearance	Not at all conceited about appearance
Female-Valued Items	
Socially Desirable	
Very talkative	Not at all talkative
Very tactful	Very blunt
Very gentle	Very rough
Very aware of feelings of others	Not at all aware of feelings of others
Very religious	Not at all religious
Very interested in own appearance	Not at all interested in own appearance
Very neat in habits	Very sloppy in habits
Very quiet	Very loud
Very strong need for security	Very little need for security
Enjoys art and literature very much	Does not enjoy art and literature at all
Easily expresses tender feelings	Does not express tender feelings at all